



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
IMPACT ASSESSMENT BOARD

Brussels,
D(2012)

Opinion

Title **DG RTD - Impact Assessment on: Communication on 'A unified European Research Area to foster efficiency, excellence and growth'**

(Resubmitted draft: version of 19 April 2012)

(A) Context

The European Research Area (ERA) is defined as a 'unified research area open to the world based on the Internal Market, in which researchers, scientific knowledge and technology circulate freely and through which the Union and its Member States shall strengthen their scientific and technological bases as well as their competitiveness'. ERA was launched with the Commission Communication 'Towards a European Research Area' in January 2000 and since then substantial efforts have been deployed for its development. However, the progress has been considered as slow and insufficient. In order to step up efforts to complete ERA, the Europe 2020 strategy flagship initiative 'Innovation Union' announced for 2012 an ERA framework and supporting measures to remove obstacles to mobility and cross-border cooperation, to be in force by the end of 2014.

(B) Overall assessment

The report has been improved to some extent along the lines of the recommendations issued by the Board in its first opinion. There are, however, several important aspects that should be further strengthened. Firstly, the report should further improve the problem definition by clarifying the link between certain obstacles and research effectiveness. Secondly, it should demonstrate the value added of the proposal by explaining in greater detail why efforts undertaken since 2000 were not successful and by clarifying why this initiative is expected to complete ERA by 2014. Thirdly, the assessment of impacts and comparison of options should be strengthened, by clearly describing how the main expected impacts will occur and by when. Finally, the report should discuss in much more detail the concrete feedback provided by stakeholders - in particular Member States - as regards their willingness and commitment to implement the required reforms at national level.

(C) Main recommendations for improvements

(1) Further improve the problem definition. While most problem drivers/obstacles are now better linked to the key problem of urgently improving research effectiveness in the EU, the link to the identified gender issues (e.g. under-representation of female researchers) requires further clarification as the evidence presented is inconclusive. In presentational terms the problem definition would benefit from a problem tree showing clearly the links between research effectiveness/innovation performance and the identified obstacles/barriers.

(2) Better demonstrate the value added of the proposal and improve some aspects of policy options. The report should still better demonstrate the value added of this initiative. In order to do so, it should explain in greater detail why efforts undertaken since 2000 when ERA was launched did not lead to the expected results, and clarify why it is expected that this initiative would now allow ERA to be completed by 2014 and the existing barriers at national level to be removed. In this context, the report should assess the feasibility of using the country specific recommendations in the European Semester as incentives to Member States to implement the voluntary measures.

(3) Strengthen the assessment of impacts and comparison of options. The report should much more clearly describe for each option how the main expected impacts will occur and by when. The discussion of expected impacts should be clearly aligned to the defined objectives. The report should also significantly strengthen the comparison of options in terms of achievement of policy objectives and efficiency by explaining how the scores were assigned to different options in table 1, indicating that these have been compared to the baseline scenario, and by substantiating with evidence the conclusions that under option 2, concrete actions will be implemented and existing barriers removed by 2014. The relevance of the distinction between short-term and long-term considerations in table 1 should be better explained. The claims with regard to major macroeconomic benefits based on model simulations should be expressed much more cautiously given the uncertainty involved. The report should clarify whether these benefits are explicitly linked to the foreseen actions, or whether they refer to a general, hypothetical scenario in which all barriers were removed, regardless of the type of intervention.

(4) Clarify stakeholders' views and monitoring arrangements. The report should refer in greater detail to the concrete feedback received from different stakeholder groups, in particular from Member States, and should discuss their willingness and commitment to undertake the required reforms at national level for all the options. As regards the monitoring arrangements, the report should be clearer about the identification of the baseline situation in terms of existing barriers which is foreseen for 2012 and which should then be used as a basis for monitoring the implementation progress. It should clarify whether the results of the baseline monitoring will feed into this proposal.

(D) Procedure and presentation

All procedural aspects appear to be respected.

(E) IAB scrutiny process	
Reference number	2012/RTD/001
External expertise used	No
Date of Board Meeting	Written procedure The present opinion concerns a resubmitted draft IA report. The first opinion was issued on 30 March 2012.